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ABSTRACT

There have been minimal investigations into the related processes of learning to read and to write and there is a real need for research to study reading and writing together in the beginning stages of literacy instruction. To determine an instructional approach for this integration, the effect on language arts achievement of dialogue journal writing between either parents or teachers and first grade students who were allowed to use invented spelling was studied. The three methods of teaching investigated were: dialogue journal writing with parents, dialogue journal writing with teachers, and a traditional language arts program. Subjects, 204 first grade students from three schools in a central Florida school district, were matched on achievement levels, socioeconomic status, and language arts curricula. One experimental group wrote in a dialogue journal with their parents at home three times per week. The other experimental group did the same, except with their teacher, in a dialogue journal. In both, children were encouraged to use invented spelling. The control group followed the traditional language arts curriculum. Findings suggest that the use of dialogue journal writing within the context of emergent literacy is not just a simple activity that integrates reading and writing but that it is an essential approach to beginning literacy whether it is administered by parent, teacher, or older student singly or in combination with each other. (One table of data is included, and 19 references are appended.) (MS)

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DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING AS AN APPROACH TO BEGINNING LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate an instructional approach for enhancing the development of beginning literacy using integrated reading and writing instruction. The effect on language arts achievement of dialogue journal writing between either parents or teachers and first grade students who were allowed to use invented spelling was studied. The three methods of teaching were: dialogue journal writing with parents, dialogue journal writing with teachers, and traditional language arts program. Eleven dependent variables measuring language arts were studied.

A total of 204 subjects in three schools completed the five month program. The MANOVA Omnibus test was significant ($p<.000$). Signficant differences were found for dependent variables evaluated singly.

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Introduction

There have been minimal investigations into the related processes of learning to read and to write. There is a need to expand the research to study reading and writing together

in the beginning stages of literacy instruction.

Teale and Sulzby (1986) challenge educators to reconceptualize their conceptions of early reading and writing theory, curricula, and instructional practices to encompass a more integrative, developmental viewpoint. They have suggested the term "emergent literacy" to reflect this change in perspective. Having credited this idea to Marie Clay (1966), they propose that reading and writing be viewed developmentally as well as integratively. Literacy is a process in which both reading and writing are intricately interwoven. Goodman (1986) calls for drastically changing preschool and early elementary school programs and reading and writing approaches to incorporate the newly expanded research base in language arts. One of the most notable changes must occur in the order in which the language arts have been taught traditionally.

The general sequence of language learning has been thought to be listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Formal reading instruction usually precedes writing instruction in the school setting. Basal reading series, focus on skills, and language experience approaches are primarily used to teach reading. Writing instruction beyond letter formation and copying text has not typically occurred until later grades after reading has been established. Contrary to this practice, research is beginning to show that some children write before they begin to read (Read, 1971; Bissex, 1980). Chomsky (1971, 1979) has suggested that children ought to compose words according to their

sounds as the first step in reading. Children learn how to read by creating their own spellings for words. They have accumulated considerable information about English, have practiced phonemic segmentation, and have had experience with alphabetic representation (Chomsky, 1979). Graves (1973) contends that writing stimulates reading and is preliminary to reading. Experiences in first grade classrooms by researchers corroborate these suggestions (Calkins, 1981; Giocobbe, 1981; Sowers, 1981).

Dyson (1982) has suggested that through writing children establish the connection between reading, writing, and language. DeFord (1981) believes that reading and writing should be viewed as integrated and supportive processes. They draw upon and stimulate one another (Pflaum, 1986). Reading and writing share common developmental origins and can develop naturally in literate cultures (Goodman, 1983). Children not only learn to read by reading and to write by writing but also learn to write by reading and read by writing (Goodman and Goodman, 1983; Goodman, 1986).

Theory and research are beginning to support the practice of having students write by spelling creatively and learn to read concurrently in beginning literacy instruction rather than withholding writing instruction until reading is mastered. Teale (1986, p.9) suggests that reading and writing are not separate for children learning, nor do they develop sequentially. The processes are mutually supportive and 'intimately tied with oral language.'

Drawing upon Harste and Burke's (1980) suggestion that reading and writing should involve open entry language activities in a risk-free environment and DeFord's (1980) idea that writing should be shared with a willing, supportive audience such as teachers, parents and peers, it is suggested that dialogue journal writing (Staton, Shuy, and Kreeft, 1982a,b; Staton, Shuy, Peyton,and Reed, 1988) between adults using conventional spelling and first grade children allowed to use invented spelling is a viable approach to enhance literacy development. Dialogue journal writing can be viewed as an extension of the language experience approach in that it not only requires decoding of a written conversation by the students but encoding as well. Dialogue journal writing with invented spelling is an activity that incorporates much of what is known about developmental writing. The journal provides the functional use of written language in a meaningful context with the opportunity for open-ended expression. Students writing to their teacher or parents have a significant audience who also serve as supporters for written expression. The journal can be viewed as a developmental link between children's natural competence in oral language and their developing competence in written language (Staton, Shuy and Kreeft, 1982a,b; Staton, Shuy, Peyton, and Reed, 1988).

Methodology

Subjects

Three schools were selected by a central Florida school district which were matched on achievement levels, SES (free

lunch programs) and language arts curricula. Approximately 100 first graders from each school participated. The number of students who completed the program was 204.

Treatment

Two experimental schools and one control school were chosen. Children in one experimental school wrote in a dialogue journal with their parents at home three times per week. Children in the other experimental school wrote three times per week with their teacher in a dialogue journal. Children were encouraged to use invented spelling. Adults were instructed to model the correct spelling of words chosen by the child and to model correct mechanics. Treatment lasted from November through March. The children in the control school received the traditional language arts curricula.

Research Questions

1. Does use of three different methods of teaching writing relate to some weighted combination of the following dependent variables?

(a) reading achievement as measured by the Stanford Achievement Test:

word reading (WR)

reading comprehension (RC)

word study skills (WSS)

(b) spelling achievement (SP)

(c) vocabulary (V)

(d) listening comprehension (LC)

(e) written expression as measured by the Metropolitan

Achievement Test- Writing Test

holistic evaluation (HOLWTG)

sentence formation (SENFORM)

word usage (WRDUSG)

content development (CONTDEV)

writing mechanics (WTGMECH)

(f) dictated spelling (DSP) as measured by the Schonell Graded Word Test?

2. Does use of the three methods of teaching relate to each of the dependent variables singly? Where appropriate, multiple contrasts are also conducted to identify specific group differences on each dependent variable.

Results

Question 1.

The MANOVA Omnibus test was significant ($p<.000$). Post hoc comparisons showed the following significant differences among treatment groups: The parent ($p<.039$) and the teacher ($p<.000$) groups, both singly and together ($p<.004$) were significantly higher than the control group. A stepdown analysis showed that holistic writing,reading comprehension, and word study skills accounted for most of the variance between groups.

Question 2.

The Scheffe' Test was conducted for those variables in which a significant univariate F occurred ie., HOLWTG, RC, DSP, WSS, LC2, SP2, and SENFORM. There were differences between the two treatment groups as well as between each treatment group and control group (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Scheffe' Analysis for Significant Univariate F's of Dependent Variables

Variable	Group	Mean	Comparison P>C	T>C	P>T	T>P	C>P	C>T
HOLWTG	Parent	4.12						
	Teacher	3.53						
	Control	2.92						
	comparison		**	*	*			
RC	Parent	538.75						
	Teacher	495.30						
	Control	514.59						
	comparison		*		**			
DSP	Parent	23.65						
	Teacher	19.20						
	Control	18.16						
	comparison		**		**			
WSS	Parent	553.64						
	Teacher	523.59						
	Control	537.72						
	comparison				**			
LC2	Parent	24.65						
	Teacher	24.38						
	Control	24.17						
	comparison		**					
SP2	Parent	22.56						
	Teacher	21.38						
	Control	22.17						
	comparison				**			
SENFORM	Parent	1.11						
	Teacher	1.07						
	Control	0.99						
	comparison		**					

Note. P= parent *= significant $p<.05$
T= teacher **= significant $p<.01$
C= control

The parent group scored significantly higher than the teacher group on five variables: HOLWTG ($p<.01$), RC ($p<.05$), DSP ($p<.01$), LC2 ($p<.01$), and SENFORM ($p<.01$) . The parent group also scored significantly higher than the

control group on five variables: HOLWTG ($p<.05$), RC ($p<.01$), DSP ($p<.01$), WSS ($p<.01$), SP2 ($p<.01$). HOLWTG is the one variable in which both the parent and teacher groups scored higher than the control group. The teacher group did not score significantly higher than the parent group on any dependent variable. The control group did not score higher than either treatment group on any variable.

Univariate F-test comparisons were computed for each dependent variable. These comparisons showed that both the parent ($p<.01$) and the teacher ($p<.05$) groups were significantly higher than the control group on the holistic writing evaluation. The parent group scored significanty higher than the control group on reading comprehension ($p<.01$), dictated spelling ($p<.05$), listening comprehension ($p<.01$), and sentence formation ($p<.01$). The parent group scored significantly higher than the teacher group on holistic writing evaluation ($p<.05$), reading comprehension ($p<.01$), dictated spelling test ($p<.01$), word study skills ($p<.01$), and spelling ($p<.05$).

Implications for Teaching

The use of dialogue journal writing within the context of emergent literacy is seen by this researcher as not just a simple activity that integrates reading and writing. This research has been exploratory in nature but has raised a major point. It is proposed that dialogue journal writing is an essential approach to beginning literacy whether it is administered by parent, teacher, or older student singly or

in combination with each other. In time, it may become a proven part of a total approach to beginning language arts instruction that also includes a language experience approach, basal readers, process writing, literature based reading program, etc. The implementation of dialogue journal writing in beginning literacy instruction within many different schooling contexts is a possibility from which many children may benefit. Therein lies the challenge.

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